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Viewing cable 08MANAGUA1514, NICARAGUA: NEW RAAS LEADERS FOCUS ON COAST NOT

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
- The bottom box presents the body of the cable. The opening can contain a more specific subject, references to other cables ([browse by origin](#) to find them) or additional comment. This is followed by the main contents of the cable: a summary, a collection of specific topics and a comment section.

To understand the justification used for the classification of each cable, please use this [WikiSource](#) article as reference.

Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#08MANAGUA1514**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
08MANAGUA1514	2008-12-19 21:26	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758468.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758464.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4103/la-embusa-y-el-gabinete-de-ortega>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4104/d-rsquo-escoto-en-onu-ldquo-un-desafio-de-ortega-a-ee-uu-rdquo>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4102/estrada-y-la-ldquo-doble-cara-rdquo-ante-ee-uu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3966/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-ee-uu-en-el-2006>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2758764.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-23/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2758753.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4041/millones-de-dolares-sin-control-y-a-discrecion>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4040/la-ldquo-injerencia-rdquo-de-venezuela-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/4047/rodrigo-barreto-enviado-de-ldquo-vacaciones-rdquo>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2757239.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/NotaPrincipal/Mundo2746658.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2757244.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-16/Mundo/Relacionados/Mundo2746673.aspx>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3991/dra-yadira-centeno-desmiente-cable-diplomatico-eeuu>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3968/pellas-pronostico-a-eeuu-victoria-de-ortega-en-2006>
<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3541
INFO RUEHZA/WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL//J2/J3/J5// PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANAGUA 001514

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR KRAAIMORE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [NU](#)

SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: NEW RAAS LEADERS FOCUS ON COAST NOT
MANAGUA

REF: A. MANAGUA 1383

[1](#)B. MANAGUA 1149

Classified By: Amb. Robert J. Callahan for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: On December 9 through 12, EmbOff traveled to the South Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAS) municipalities of El Rama, Bluefields, Pearl Lagoon, and Corn Island as well as the coastal communities of Rama Cay and Monkey Point to meet with outgoing mayors, mayor-elects, and community leaders. Interviews revealed that even Frente Sandinista National Liberation (FSLN) mayors were more interested in developing their coastal communities and cooperating with the international community than in focusing on the national political battles underway in Managua over election fraud.
END SUMMARY

El RAMA - BETWEEN REGIONAL INDEPEDENCE OR INTEGRATION
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[1](#)2. (C) On December 9, EmbOff met with current Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) Mayor Roger Araica, and PLC mayor-elect Walda Obando, before continuing by panga boat down the Escondido River to RAAS capital Bluefields. El Rama municipality has 47 communities with a population that is 70 percent rural / 30 percent urban. The municipal capital, El Rama, is a crossroads community situated on the north side of the junction between the Escondido River and El Rama River and also at the far eastern terminus of a paved highway linked to the rest of Nicaragua. The paved highway has transformed El Rama into the primary port city of the Atlantic coast for container traffic, even though the Escondido River depth and width limits the size of vessels that can use this port facility.

[1](#)3. (C) Mayor Araica explained that since the FSLN presidential victory in 2006, there has been increasing pressure from the national government to use Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) for social programs. The recent November 9 municipal elections preserved the traditional PLC control of the municipality despite FSLN fraud tactics (see RefTel A). Mayor Araica noted that the day after the election, 40 CPC members gathered outside his home, threatening him and his family, until he called for 80 PLC supporters to scare them off. Both Mayor Araica and Mayor-elect Obando explained that while El Rama is historically part of the RAAS, it does not enjoy any of the rights and benefits of being part of the autonomous region. According to Araica and Obando, the people in El Rama want to be independent from the RAAS because they currently have no representation on the regional council which sets a budget for development projects within the region. Unless there is reform to Law 28, the law that

created the autonomous regions, followed by reform to election laws and regional council rules, there will be increased tension. Either way, leaders in the area will face difficult choices between remaining an integrated part of the RAAS without full representation or supporting unpopular legislation by National Assembly Deputies Brooklyn Rivera and Francisco Sacasa to create a new department within the RAAS (see RefTel B).

RAMA CAY & MONKEY POINT - ISOLATED, THUS NEGLECTED,
COMMUNITIES

14. (C) On December 10, EmbOff traveled by panga boat with Rama Territory President Santiago Thomas to the Atlantic coastal communities of Monkey Point (see RefTel B), Willing Cay and Rama Cay island in the Bluefields lagoon. Monkey Point has been the potential location for a deep water Atlantic coast port project since 1913, when Germany made the first investments by laying railroad tracks for a transnational railroad (the remains of which are still visible). The community today represents approximately 200 indigenous Kriol people in 50 or more family groups concentrated near the coast. People subsist on fishing and small gardens in a community without a store for supplies, or even a dock to moor small canoes and panga boats. In addition to the wooden homes with corrugated steel roofs, there is a cement school building, and a cement community health center that has been vacant for several years. (NOTE:

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Community leaders blame the central government for not posting a permanent nurse and supplies to the clinic, after building the center and promising to staff and supply it). Monkey Point has four Nicaraguan military guards stationed in the community and their presence has reduced drug trafficking in the area; however, the community lacks basic health services, a potable water and sewer system, and the only source of electricity comes from a recent French NGO Blue-Energy windmill project that brings power primarily to the school and a few homes.

15. (C) The village of Rama Cay is located on two joining islands within the Bluefields lagoon, and is home to approximately 500 Rama Indians. The adjoining islands are overcrowded with wooden homes; there is almost no room for small gardens, nor is there a potable water source, electricity or sewage system for the community. Unlike Monkey Point, there is a school/community center and a Moravian church on the island, as well as wooden docks for the panga boats and canoes that residents use to fish for shrimps or travel between the mainland. Rama territorial leaders continue to fight for demarcation of their traditional lands by the central government and are seeking international support to develop their lands for agriculture and potential tourism. On December 7, they filed a public lawsuit against the Ortega government for not completing the demarcation process one year after the original survey was completed (see RefTel B).

BLUEFIELDS - REGIONAL CAPITAL IN SEARCH OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

16. (C) On December 9 and 10, EmbOff held meetings with RAAS Regional Council President Lourdes Aguilar Gibbs, Governor Yadira Flores, Catholic Church Bishop Pablo Schmidt, and PLC mayor-elect Dr. Harold Bacon. Bishop Schmidt, a US citizen who has been serving in the Catholic Church in Nicaragua since 1972, framed the basic issues of the Atlantic Coast as the result of a huge wave of emigration from the Pacific side of Nicaragua - in 1970 the Atlantic Coast population was approximately 350,000, today it is approximately 900,000. The emigration wave has changed the politics and demographics

of the region dramatically - mestizos now outnumber black Kriols and indigenous groups (i.e., Miskito, Mayagna, Suma and Rama) almost two to one. The coast has been essentially economically isolated from the rest of Nicaragua and is now suffering from the fact that remittances from the coastal people working in the U.S. are substantially lower since the worldwide economic downturn, as are employment opportunities for English-speaking costenos on Caribbean cruise ships. Moreover, the paved highway to El Rama and its port facilities have also severely damaged Bluefields' economy. Both of these economic factors could lead to a further deterioration of the Bluefields economy. (COMMENT: Perhaps that is why all of the political and community leaders we spoke with stressed the need for Bluefields to get connected to by road to the rest of Nicaragua to improve its economic circumstances. If Bluefields remains isolated, it will lose its role as the regional political and economic capital of the RAAS. END COMMENT) Mayor-elect Bacon and President Aguilar both agree that the road to Bluefields from Nueva Guinea or to El Rama is the best long-term solution for helping their community. Mayor-elect Bacon explained that he is committed to having a transparent administration that will continue investment into basic services (roads, electricity, water, and health) for his community.

PEARL LAGOON - A GREAT NAME, BUT NO PARADISE

17. (C) On December 11, EmbOff traveled by panga boat to Pearl Lagoon to meet with the FSLN mayor-elect Robert Cutberg, representatives from the Moravian Church, and the PLC mayoral candidate Jacqueline Taylor. Mayor-elect Cutberg calls himself a political outsider, as a non-Kriol, Miskito Indian from a rural community outside of the city of Pearl Lagoon. His election, while contested, would be the first time that Pearl Lagoon is led by a non-Kriol mayor. Cutberg is committed to making more roads to connect the 17 communities within the Pearl Lagoon municipality - so far 12 communities have access to roads. The second priority for his administration is increasing tourism; however, Pearl Lagoon

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lacks the infrastructure needed to attract international tourists - paved streets, 24-hour uninterrupted power and potable water. Cutberg said that CPCs will not be a part of his administration because there is a functioning communal authority that already fills this role.

CORN ISLAND - COULD BE A CARRIBEAN PARADISE

18. (C) On December 11 and 12, EmbOff held meetings with Corn Island municipal council member Richard Downs, PLC mayoral candidate and regional council member Ena Moses, outgoing PLC mayor Alex Dixon, and FSLN mayor-elect Cleveland Webster. Corn Island, with its turquoise waters and white-sand beaches, is a microcosm of the emigration wave that has changed the Atlantic Coast during the past forty years. Corn Island and Little Corn Island have approximately 10,000 inhabitants currently, up from the 3,000 in the 1970s. Most of the emigrants to the island are Mestizo or Miskito Indian. The local economy is heavily reliant on lobster fishing; tourism only accounts for five to ten percent of the economy. Unfortunately, the island suffers from lack of basic services, namely: potable water, garbage collection and reliable electricity. The current mayor has made significant steps to improve the island's security and electrical power situation, growing the police force from four to 20 and adding two additional diesel-run generators to the island's power grid. The lack of regular garbage collection and of a large landfill on the island keeps the beaches littered with flotsam and jetsam washed up from the Caribbean tides. Downs, who is also the Corn Island PLC party leader, explained that the FSLN won the election by convincing the

people that an FSLN mayor would receive greater national support to address the island,s problems. Mayor-elect Webster said that he is an "islander" first and a Sandinista second, and will work to improve the lot of his fellow citizens during his four year term. His 75 percent victory in the polls gives him a mandate to govern and try new programs; however, his primary focus will be improving the infrastructure to attract more tourists to the island.

COMMENT

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19. (C) Throughout the meetings with mayors, mayors-elect, and community leaders, the biggest issues facing the RAAS were the impact of Pacific-side emigration on the traditional communities and their lack of infrastructure, both community and economic to effectively absorb new migrants. The worldwide economic downturn, and with it falling remittances and lobster prices will put enormous pressures against the economy of the RAAS. In the past, the isolation and lack of roads helped preserve the traditional cultures, but now these represent barriers to its development. New mayors hope to improve roads and services for their communities to increase agriculture and attract tourist to this resource-rich region.
CALLAHAN